

Chapter 5

‘He Has a Better Chance Here, So We Stay’. Children’s Education and Parental Migration Decisions



Magdalena Ślusarczyk and Agnieszka Malek

5.1 Introduction

In traditional terms, welfare has been defined as ‘a set of entitlements and provision provided by the state or guaranteed by it’ (Sciortino 2004, 113) or, more broadly, as a ‘sphere of activities of the state and other public bodies and social forces that is involved in the development of living conditions of people and interpersonal relations (especially in the living and working environment)’ (Rajkiewicz 1998, 17). These definitions primarily highlight the role of state authorities and public institutions as key entities regarding the provision of social protection. Today, the role of other entities has been on the increase – that of market or non-governmental organisations – which is reflected in terms such as welfare pluralism, welfare mix or multi-sectoral social protection. In the welfare-mix model, based on integrating a number of different entities, the state, the markets and the family are seen as crucial sources of responding to and managing social risks (Powell and Barrientos 2004, 85–86). This approach is useful for understanding the immigrants’ choices and decisions, which are the focus of our chapter. The achievement of basic social protection for citizens has resulted in the appearance of new expectations of the state’s assignments and the expansion of the catalogue of benefits it provides (Głąbicka 2001). Education has become one such area; though it ‘is not always recognised as part of the welfare state’s policy package, it is, no less than other public programmes, recognised as a core entitlement in most Western societies’ (Hega and Hokenmaier 2002, 2). The increased importance of education as a factor determining life chances has undoubtedly played a major role in this outcome. The purpose of this chapter is to bring education under the umbrella of the analysis of welfare protection for migrant families. We assume that, when making decisions on migration and/or its continuation, individuals and families act independently but within external

M. Ślusarczyk (✉) · A. Malek
Jagiellonian University, Kraków, Poland
e-mail: magdalena.slusarczyk@uj.edu.pl; agnieszka.malek@uj.edu.pl

considerations which include, among others, the social protection offered by the state and society of their destination (Grabowska-Lusińska 2012, 13). We demonstrate that the inclusive social system of Norway does not have to be a key pull factor at the moment of emigration; however, it is of importance when the decision is made to transform a migration project from a temporary one into settlement or, conversely, a return to the country of origin. In the case of families with children, assessment of the educational system and educational opportunities in the countries of destination as compared to those of the country of origin is one of the key issues. This is because a decision to send a child to a Norwegian school means a decision in favour of a longer stay in Norway or even settlement (Gmaj 2016; Huang et al. 2015). It is also interesting to consider whether and to what extent the school contributes to the process of integration of children in peer groups on the one hand and of their parents through engagement in the life of the school and their subsequent contact with other families on the other. Comparing the Polish and Norwegian educational systems, it is the latter that puts more emphasis on the active involvement of parents at school. This is different from the Polish context, which justifies our inquiries into how Polish parents in Norway respond to such expectations and whether ideas and practices from the community of origin become transferred, negotiated or transformed or, alternatively, whether Norwegian patterns are accepted.

In Polish migration studies the issues of welfare and immigration have been recognised but only to a small degree. Migration decisions have been mainly considered through the prism of the labour market and the role and importance of social networks, whereas the welfare dimension has only been identified as a possible pull factor.¹ The system of social care has been an object of analysis primarily in relation to two-way intergenerational transfers relating to social protection (Krzyżowski 2013; Krzyżowski and Mucha 2014) and in research into female migrants who undertook employment in domestic and care service, especially in countries in which state institutional support and financial expenditure for the care of elderly and dependent persons are limited (Małek 2012). In this chapter, we focus on another aspect of welfare – namely its educational dimension. We are especially interested in the way in which migrant parents perceive the educational concept of the Norwegian state. We examine the situations in which they develop upward strategies of pragmatic (and sometimes instrumental) use of educational opportunities related to life chances for their children. It is also important to mention that migrant parents, living in a transnational space, assess all the possibilities, resources and their own activities through two prisms: their lives in Norway and the relationships which they maintain with their country of origin – in this case, Poland.

¹ By way of example, Joanna Napierała (2008, 36) anticipated that, with increasing penetration of the Norwegian labour market by Polish employees, ‘Norwegian pay and social care’ would be the key pull factors.

5.2 Welfare and Migration

Until now, research into the impact of the welfare state on migration decisions and strategies has mostly been based on an analysis of statistical data (the examination of the structure of social expenditure) and carried out from a macro-social and macro-economic perspective (Blank 1988; Borjas 1999; Giulietti and Wahba 2012). It has primarily focused on the issue of migrants using the social benefits available in the countries of destination and on answering the question of whether social packages act as 'welfare magnets' or whether migrants follow the strategy of 'welfare shopping' (Borjas 1999; Péridy 2006). The research results are not unequivocal. Borjas (1999), who authored one of the best-known papers on the topic, argued that the expanded welfare state impacted on the skill composition of migrants – attracting low-skilled migrants – and that it acted as a buffer protecting against turmoil on the labour market. Immigrants are perceived as calculating individuals, whose choice of where to migrate to are guided by income-maximising behaviour (Borjas 1999, 634–635). For example, analysis of internal migration in the United States shows that traditionally generous states with extensive social support systems, such as California, New York and Wisconsin, are magnets drawing persons with low resources to secure comparatively higher benefits (Levine and Zimmerman 1999). Razin and Wahba (2011, 28) criticised such simple explanations, stressing that the skill composition of immigrants depended also on such factors as the policy regime or on access to migrant networks, since these lower the costs of migration (Giulietti and Wahba 2012). Razin and Wahba (2011) argued that the welfare magnet hypothesis is possible in free-migration regimes, where the generous systems of benefits mostly attract unskilled immigrants. In turn, research done by De Giorgi and Pellizzari (2009) into European immigration prior to the extension of the European Union in 2004 proved that the level of social protection in the receiving state had a measurable but limited impact on migration decisions, though these were certainly stronger in the case of non-qualified migrants from the new member states.

Other directions of research into welfare and migration related to the consequences of the lack of migrants' access to social protection (Van Ginneken 2013), integration, immigration and welfare state policies (Brochmann and Hagelund 2012) and the ways in which welfare regimes interacted with migration regimes (Sciortino 2004). Though the research area has been growing with the expanding notion of welfare, there is still a shortage of papers that consider the positioning of individuals in a transnational social field and use a quality-based approach emphasising the practices and judgements followed by the migrants themselves.

Classical models of welfare states (Esping-Andersen 1990, 2005; Titmuss 1974) are based on an indication of the institutional differences in the distribution process of produced welfare and their impact on social stratification. The various means of distribution and redistribution of resources are perceived as being different models of welfare states (Esping-Andersen 1990; Golinowska 2018). The declining explanatory power of these traditional models has encouraged the emergence of

new proposals, with the attendant inclusion of additional, non-economic criteria. In addition, as stressed by Golinowska (2018, 20), ‘non-social areas, belonging to so-called social investments: education, health care, housing have been increasingly more frequently included in the description of the welfare state’. This finds evidence in modern social-policy models which incorporate variables relating to labour-market regulations and educational services and assumptions of educational systems (see Szarfenberg 2009, 20). When adopting a broader concept of treating social policy as a field of influence, then labour, quality of life, social order and culture – including education – should all be incorporated into the concept of welfare.

The increasing volume of migration and the resultant intensification of transnational engagements bring with them new ways in which to theorise and explain these processes. The proposals offered by Levitt (2007) and Levitt et al. (2017) incorporate into the analysis migrants and non-migrants and the number of transnational engagements. This marks a departure from adopting the perspective of the receiving or the sending country only and thus ‘splitting migrants’ lives into disconnected areas’ (Serra Mingot and Mazzucato 2018, 142), in favour of the simultaneous inclusion of both locations. Levitt et al. (2017) offer an analysis of how migrants navigate transnational social protection spaces to piece together resources across the international borders of nation states. Moreover, they emphasise that social protection should not be perceived only through the prism of the state as the main source of protection but that it should additionally consider three further sources: the market, the third sector and social networks (Levitt et al. 2015, 6). All the resources available to migrants from these four sources, scattered across international borders, constitute migrants’ welfare resources environment, which operates transnationally. At the same time, the scope of support available from each of the sources varies for the different individuals and is also dependent on the time and place (Levitt et al. 2015). The content of social coverage is thus partially regulated by the state and depends on the model adopted (for instance in the marginal model, the basic channels of protection include the market and the family and, therefore, the state offer will be insignificant). Conversely, ‘the social protections available to any person are strongly influenced by his or her individual characteristics – education, skills, resources, the legal status, the country of origin, the country of residence, the place of residence within a country, social networks and so on’ (Levitt et al. 2015, 12).

Nordic countries which represent the social-democratic type of welfare-state regime (Esping-Andersen 1990) are typically characterised by a universal access to social protection and high levels of redistribution (Brochmann and Hagelund 2012; Dziewiecka-Bokun 1999) and are regarded as ‘encompassing’ welfare states (Korpi 2000). They also, in general, provide universal free access to health care and education (including such aspects as textbooks and educational aids). An important criterion applied to the Scandinavian model is the principle of social responsibility – or activities aimed at having such a social-policy system in which, through the joint collaboration of its citizens, the needs of all community members will be satisfied at an appropriately high level.

In recent years, significant migration from new EU member states to Norway has stirred up a discussion over the universal social-support model that provides (or does not) migrants with immediate access to the resources of the receiving country (Brochmann and Hagelund 2012; Strzemecka 2015; Ślusarczyk and Pustułka 2016; Ślusarczyk et al. 2018; Wærdahl 2016). In the case of Norway, social coverage for distinct categories of immigrants differs. For example, Polish and other EU/EEA migrants are not entitled to free Norwegian language courses, as they are viewed by the authorities as self-sufficient migrants moving to Norway primarily for work reasons. They must pay for these courses or look for alternative sources of support (e.g. free courses arranged by various organisations).²

5.3 School as an Element of the Welfare State

The school has a special place in the analysis of processes relating to migration. Since education is compulsory, it becomes a test of the adopted strategy of integration; in view of the common belief in the importance of both a formal education and the knowledge and skills for life that an individual gains at school, education is an object of constant interest among parents (see Lopez Rodriguez 2010; Mikiewicz 2016; Niezgoda 2011; Ślusarczyk 2010). From a state point of view, the school is a place in which to shape citizens; similarly, it is an object of constant interest among politicians (Boli et al. 1985; Coleman and Hoffer 1987; Hadjar and Becker 2009; Labaree 2012; Meighan 1977). For migrant families with children, schooling can be a turning point, since the decision about which country their children will go to school in involves a choice between returning to the country of origin or settling in the receiving country.

The current form of the Norwegian educational system was shaped after World War II. Its fundamental features include a uniform educational system and curriculum and a teachers' educational system standardised across the country (Mańkowska 2012). Key values of Norwegian society include egalitarianism and co-operation, both of which researchers trace back to historic conditions: the absence of either a feudal system or a home-grown aristocracy, which led to the development of a 'country of farmers and fishermen' (Aase 2008, 13–17 cited in Mańkowska 2014, 54). The inclusiveness of the schools, the equality, the co-operation of the social partners and the solidarity of the citizenry are all based on these same assumptions. The purpose of the system is to provide children and young people with an equal right to education, regardless of their place of residence, gender or social and

²It is arguable whether access to free language courses is indispensable in the case of economic migrants and whether it should be treated as a part of social-welfare protection. Moreover, highly skilled migrants from third countries who are staying in Norway on temporary work permits are not, as a rule, entitled to unemployment benefit. However, migrants themselves perceive this lack of access to Norwegian language courses as a form of inequality (Ślusarczyk 2019).

cultural background – thus the provision includes those who are migrants.³ The adoption of these goals, among others, meant that there would be no selection or segregation of pupils according to ability and also no practice of having a student repeat a class within the period of compulsory education (primary schools and the first level of secondary school). Furthermore, there would be no separation of children with special educational needs (the disabled, immigrants and those lacking knowledge of the mother tongue).⁴ The school is also obliged to take care of the necessary facilities and professionals, e.g. teacher assistants (Mańkowska 2014; Ślusarczyk 2019). The Norwegian school expects solidarity and co-operation from parents and assistance in the attainment of the various educational, socialisational and integrational goals by, for instance, working together to organise extracurricular activities or friendship groups⁵ (Mańkowska 2014; Wærdahl 2005, 2016).

5.4 School and Life Chances

As mentioned in the previous section, the decision to send a child to school in the receiving country often resulted in the family either settling there permanently or at least for the long-term (Gmaj 2016; Ryan et al. 2009; Ślusarczyk and Pustulka 2016). Even if immigration seems to be a short-term solution to economic difficulties, as soon as the children's schooling is involved it becomes a point of reference. One of the main factors here is the comparison of the educational opportunities in Poland and Norway. Based on this assessment, parents decide which educational system can provide their children with better life chances. As it is broadly understood, the term 'life chances' encompasses the parents' imagination and ideas concerning the future of their children – in particular, the educational, professional, economic and social prospects that would enable the children to maintain their

³ Developed in the period after World War II, the model remained in place until the 1990s, with just minor modifications. It was meant to embody socio-democratic ideas and thus, primarily, to provide equal educational opportunities (Mańkowska 2014). It also implied the marginalisation of non-public schooling as it was felt that private schools contributed to an increase in social differences. Introduced as of the 1990s, neoliberal elements, especially the principle of freedom of choice and adjustment to a competitive market (Ahonen 2002) brought about changes – such as a turning point in the case of private schools (since 2002) – and the publication of school rankings in terms of the students' performances at the end of the compulsory education stage, which had been prohibited before (Welle-Strand and Tjedvoll 2009).

⁴ Some municipalities and/or schools place migrants in special schools or classes. However this is an opportunity for children with a migration background to receive support from bilingual teachers in introductory/welcome classes or school until they know enough Norwegian to join the regular class. The choice of solution depends on the policy adopted, the financial possibilities of the commune and the number of migrant children (Ślusarczyk and Nikielska-Sekuła 2014; Wærdahl 2016).

⁵ A school class is subdivided into smaller groups – friendship groups (in Norwegian, *vennegrupper*). The parents of the children in the group are supposed to organise a social gathering at the start of the term and invite all of the children from the group to their homes. The children can play together while the parents spend some time together and get to know each other better.

parents' social status or even allow them to take 'one step up on the ladder' are all taken into account (Brown 2013; Croll 2004; Lopez Rodriguez 2010).

In general – and not simply in the case of migrant parents – Polish parents' aspirations and expectations for their children's education are relatively high (Kozłowski and Matczak 2014).⁶ In Martha Nussbaum's (2016) division between education for profit and education for democracy, the focus of Polish parents is more on the sphere of future benefits and what they would expect from schooling (Guðmundsson and Mikiewicz 2012; Mikiewicz 2014; Ślusarczyk et al. 2018). Randall Collins (1979) called it a strategy of 'escaping forward' when individuals try to achieve more 'credentials' and educational accomplishments (diplomas, certificates etc.) to grant themselves (or their children) a 'better future'⁷ but sometimes also in order to avoid social or economic deprivation. The high aspirations of Polish migrants correspond to the situation in post-transformation Poland, when seeking to achieve a higher level of education was a coping strategy against unemployment and growing differentiation in society, as in the 1970s in the United States (Adamski 1977, see also Długosz 2009, 2013; Gmerek 2011; Ślusarczyk 2010). Although this strategy did not lead to success but, rather, to the depreciation in the value of diplomas and an increase in social inequality, it did, however, spread across Polish society (Długosz 2009; Nyczaj-Drag 2011).

Polish migrant parents' experiences of the post-communist transformational period in Poland, with its many years of unstable labour markets and low wages, make them no exception. Even if, as migrants, they accept deskilling or a lower social position themselves, when it comes to their children they present different expectations (Garapich 2016; Lopez Rodriguez 2017). When reflecting on their children's education, Polish parents prefer the strategy of an 'escape forward', choosing the educational system which they perceive as better and – if possible – seeking greater advantages (e.g. choosing the school assessed as being the best, with additional activities for pupils and exerting pressure to achieve the best results). Such an approach is the most characteristic among parents from the middle and upper classes (Sadura 2018) and may be termed a transnational game for seeking greater opportunities everywhere.

⁶Data on the level of parents' expectations is provided by cyclical PISA surveys (Dolata et al. 2013; Federowicz 2013; Federowicz and Sitek 2017). They document their unchanging high level – about half of parents hope that their children will obtain at least a Master's degree and about 30% are counting on a doctoral degree.

⁷In terms of social status and a professional career in knowledge-intensive economies which push up the skills premium (Esping-Andersen 2005).

5.5 Methodology

The empirical material that serves as the foundation of our analysis was collected within the framework of the research project *Transfam*.⁸ This chapter is more particularly based on 31 biographical interviews, partially structured, conducted with 41 persons. Respondents were Polish families living with their children in Oslo and its environs who had lived in Norway for at least 6 months (the longest stay was over 20 years, while the average was 8.5 years). Our respondents consisted of 10 couples interviewed together, and 21 individual interviews, 19 women and two men. Such disproportions are not uncommon in family research as women tend to be the 'default' informants on family matters, especially in societies with the rather traditional gender order one finds in Poland (see e.g. Kilkey et al. 2013 or Pustulka 2015). The number of children per family varied between one and five and their age from a few months to early adulthood (23 years of age). There were substantial differences in terms of their place of origin, education and professional status. The respondents came from different regions of Poland, both from big cities (including Warsaw) and from smaller towns and villages. Their educational background was diverse: 27 held a university degree, 11 graduated from high or technical schools and three from vocational schools. The majority (32) of respondents were employed (from low-level jobs to prestigious positions), whereas nine were unemployed or currently not working (e.g. maternity leave).

The scope of the research covered a wide range of areas related to migration and family life: from the decision to leave, through settlement, to any potential decision on staying longer or permanently. We were also interested in the process of entering the labour market, how leisure time was spent, in the division of roles in the family and how the children were being raised. Education was a particularly important area and we inquired about the process of making educational decisions – including sending children to kindergarten and the perception of the school and related expectations, about learning the Norwegian and Polish languages and, among others, about the possible decision to send children to a Polish supplementary school, as well as about their family language strategies.

⁸*Doing Family in Transnational Context. Demographic Choices, Welfare Adaptations, School Integration and Every-day Life of Polish Families Living in Polish-Norwegian Transnationality* (2013–2016). The project was financed by Norway Grants under the Polish-Norwegian Research Programme carried out by the National Centre for Research and Development, Contract No. Pol-Not/197905/4/2013. The fieldwork took place in February–March 2014 by Paula Pustulka, Inga Hajdarowicz and Anna Bednarczyk.

5.6 Migrant Strategies in the Context of the Welfare State

5.6.1 *Norwegian School in the Eyes of Polish Parents*

A division into narrower and broader understandings of the welfare state is important in the context of the analysis of migrant strategies. We believe that the migrants' point of departure is usually first the view from a labour-market perspective, labour protection and the prospect of welfare and social protection⁹ and Norway is very highly rated in these areas (Isaksen 2016).¹⁰ The early stages of Polish migration to Norway right after the enlargement of the EU were dominated by men, mostly with a lower level of education and qualifications, who migrated for employment mainly in the construction and fossil-fuel industries (Friberg and Eldring 2011; Friberg and Tyldum 2007; Iglicka et al. 2016, 2018). An important factor involved in the decision to migrate was the difference in pay and purchasing power, which meant that the migration of only one member of the household appeared a sensible, pragmatic choice, with the rest of the family remaining back in Poland (Friberg 2012; Sokół-Rudowska 2011).

The second, less common form which, nonetheless, marked a more distinct trend, was made up of migrants who would arrive with their families from the start or who would quickly bring them in to the receiving country (Gmaj 2016). Generally, such migrants have a higher educational background, their position on the labour market is also better and their perception of Norway as a welfare state is broader and relates to the life chances of their children, too.¹¹ Thus, with the extension of their stay in Norway, the perception has expanded to include the dimension of the work-life balance, and, within the family context, a reflection about the consequences of either staying or returning for the future of their children (Gmaj 2016; Iglicka et al. 2018). First of all, they become aware that, if their children start to attend school in Norway, the family will probably stay for a longer period of time. Adam¹² (8 years in Norway), one of the fathers interviewed, stressed that it 'would be hard' for his daughters to change school where they have friends and also to get used to a different educational system. Knowing Polish school from his own experiences, he

⁹There is also, of course, a range of other migration reasons – e.g. family matters, marriage or quality of life in the receiving country; nevertheless, labour migration is the dominant type among Polish migrants (e.g. Huang et al. 2015).

¹⁰Existing research shows a worse situation for migration workers in that respect. In the case of Polish migrants, the instability of employment, pay discrimination, failure to comply with OHS (Occupational Health and Safety) rules or gender-related opportunities on the labour market are indicated (Engebrigtsen et al. 2017). Simultaneously, migrants point to activities of the Norwegian Tax Administration, or *Skatteetaten*, which persecutes dishonest employers, while stressing that these are conspicuous but not common cases. A major proportion of Polish migrants declare that they enjoy favourable and stable forms of employment (Huang et al. 2015).

¹¹This statement was confirmed by most of our respondents (see also Gmaj 2016; Huang et al. 2015).

¹²The names of all respondents have been anonymised.

was convinced there would be ‘big obstacles and curriculum differences’. So, as Huang et al. (2015) point out, sending a child to a Norwegian school is one of the most important reasons for staying longer or even for settling in Norway. The other perspective is the calculation of life chances. Sabina (6 years in Norway) and her husband decided that their son, ‘who was bilingual and in general felt good here’, had greater opportunities in Norway – by which they understood the possibility of studying at a good university and obtaining a better career in the future.

When migrant children start at a Norwegian school, the parents’ first concern is how well they will cope with the new situation. Their worries relate to their children not possessing sufficient Norwegian and not adapting to the school environment due to their migratory background. They appreciate, therefore, the language support for children – like, for instance, introductory classes or a native language teacher. They stress the importance of individual assistance for children which, in their case, is especially needed at the early stage of learning the language, as Jan (7 years in Norway) explains about his daughter, A.:

Of course, the beginnings were quite hard, because she started to learn Norwegian in kindergarten then, on the first or second day, we got a phone call that we had to go to pick up the child, because she was crying horribly (...). And one of the tutors, such an old lady, very, very patient, would sit her on her lap and teach her Norwegian words. After two weeks there were no problems at all and next, it just went on smoothly. So, there weren’t any problems or complaints or issues with A.

Parents also appreciate the Norwegian schools for the reduced burdens imposed on their children. Cyryl (14 years in Norway) stresses that ‘they [the pupils] are not graded here’ [in primary school]. He is not sure in which year grading begins – he thinks the third or fifth grade¹³ – but he perceives the fact that it is impossible for the child to fail as an advantage. Some parents rate the school curriculum positively, likewise with the emphasis put on the ability to take care of themselves. Sabina admits that ‘they [Norwegians] bring up children differently here’ and emphasises that her son, in his first school year, ‘beautifully learnt how to prepare food’. She compares this with her own experiences with Polish kindergarten¹⁴ where everything was served and, therefore, believes that the Norwegian educational system is more focused on practical skills. Other parents value the fact that the curricula are not overloaded compared to Polish schools and that children are also taught empathy and encouraged to express their emotions, talk about them and try to understand them. Some of the respondents pointed out that this will probably produce better learning results than the larger number of hours spent at school and the intense pressure to succeed found in Polish schools.

With time their opinions tend to become more nuanced. What at first seemed like an advantage (the curricula or the way of teaching and learning) later raise concerns

¹³ In fact it is from eighth grade. This quote demonstrates that migrant parents are familiar with the system only to a certain degree – there are things that they do not yet know.

¹⁴ The respondent is referring to the pre-school period because her child, who in Norway has already started attending school, would still have been in kindergarten in Poland, where school attendance is mandatory from age seven, although it is possible for a six-year-old to attend.

and sometimes criticism. The respondents, like Kornelia (8 years in Norway) are also used to comparing the requirements in Norwegian schools to those in Poland (at least as far as they can remember or have been told by relatives):

The educational system, well... far behind, but I won't say behind who. If P. [daughter] had come here at the age of 10, she would have been a year or two ahead of her peers. My brother is a year older than P. and is a fourth-grader [in Poland] and the maths curriculum is at a much higher level; they here... I don't know... have a different level of teaching and educational system.

The comparisons quoted relate to a very important aspect concerning the attitude towards school or, namely, aspirations. Kornelia expressed the concerns of many Polish parents who expect a high level of teaching, often identified as a good quality education. They hope for good school results and, if possible, special achievements (e.g. winning school competitions etc.) because they equate these with increasing the life chances of their children. The equality and inclusiveness at school that migrants favourably assess at the stage of entering the educational system, when later confronted with their aspirations, become an obstacle (Ślusarczyk 2019; Ślusarczyk and Pustułka 2016). Referring to Norwegian schooling, Polish parents thus asked themselves if was 'good' or, rather, if the level of transferred knowledge would provide their child with the opportunity to go to a good secondary school and university and then on to a well-paid job. If the answer was negative they tended to seek solutions which would increase their children's educational chances. Confronted with Norwegian society and its school system, migrant parents appreciate the egalitarianism and inclusiveness and accept the language or integrational support but would also like to 'equip' their children with extra skills or competences.

Moreover Polish migrant parents, in their first years in the receiving country, do not fully understand the Norwegian concept of education, which assumes a deeper parental involvement in the life of the school (e.g. organising extracurricular activities, participating in voluntary work or actively taking part in friendship groups). They do not see these as activities that are beneficial to the children but as additional burdens. Patrycja (17 years in Norway) refers here to a fundamental argument often put forward by Polish immigrants – since she works hard, the school should not and could not demand too much from her. Part of this reasoning is also due to the fact that, in the Polish educational system, neither intense parental involvement nor socialising with other parents is expected.¹⁵ With time, however, 'for the sake of

¹⁵ The role of the parent is still seen as quite passive although the education law creates a space for home-school collaboration (Banasiak 2013; Mendel 2002; Zbróg 2011). Parental committees sometimes contribute to the cost of investment and occasionally carry out any necessary renovations etc. or provide support with regard to organising school excursions or events but only a few parents are interested in being a member of such a committee (Ślusarczyk 2010). There is also very limited parental interest and willingness to partake in shaping the school's curriculum, lesson plans, etc. (though some schools do involve parents in these decisions). The parents' involvement also depends on many other factors, especially their socio-economic status and social milieu. There are also huge differences between public and private schools where, in the latter, parents can sometimes influence the whole process of schooling. Still, as most of our respondents confirm,

their children' (Malwina, 11 years in Norway) migrant parents become more and more involved and have an opportunity to gradually accept or follow the expectations of actions of solidarity aimed at having the best school possible. An example could be Antonina (24 years in Norway), who now runs sporting activities at school. Magda (8 years in Norway) helps with all school events and Malwina was, for some time, engaged as a native language teacher.

5.6.2 *Increasing Life Chances – Parents' Supplementary Strategies*

Despite entering the Norwegian educational system, Polish migrants in Norway remain in a transnational complex of relationships, references and beliefs. When calculating the life chances of their children, they measure staying in Norway against a potential return to Poland or migrating to another country. This means that they tend to transfer solutions from Poland – or those applied in a competitive system – into the realities of school in Norway, since migrants would then benefit from both what they receive under the welfare-state approach – egalitarianism and inclusiveness – and from the additional resources with which they would 'equip' their children. The basic solution here requires permanent interference in the learning process of the child and the expectation of achievement. One of the mothers interviewed told us how she had to look on the Internet for additional homework exercises for her daughter who, according to her, 'was not sufficiently stimulated' at her Norwegian school. She also said that the school 'just undermined' her daughter's capabilities and did not benefit her at all and she regretted that the Norwegian school did not encourage pupils to take part in international competitions like '*Kangourou Sans Frontières*'.¹⁶ Finally, she moved her daughter to an international school as she considered it to be more supportive and more responsive to her daughter's needs.

Another interviewee, Agata (4 years in Norway), did not change her daughter's school but was actively pushing for her daughter to achieve the best results possible – doing her homework with her and sometimes even for her. She admitted that 'it was not that fair; perhaps the other children had written it on their own' but all she wanted was to help her daughter. She was anxious about her daughter's school results and tried to motivate her to work more by repeatedly telling her she was good but could be even better if she tried harder.

In their efforts to increase their children's educational opportunities, Polish migrant parents also seek solutions outside the school system, such as educational camps or summer schools in Poland (especially focused on Polish

Polish migrants come to Norway with the conviction that family and school operate as quite separate institutions.

¹⁶ *Kangourou sans Frontières* is an international association founded in France to support the teaching of mathematics in schools and to promote a positive perception of the subject. Its most popular activity is the annual Kangaroo Mathematics Competition.

language-learning) or attending Polish Saturday schools in Norway.¹⁷ This fits into a strategy of navigating resources locally and across borders to increase the sense of safety and their life chances in the case of children (Levitt et al. 2017). Jan, for example, sent her daughter for the summer holidays to Poland and part of that time was devoted to studying to 'brush up both her Polish and English'. Helena (17 years in Norway), in turn, urged her daughters to attend a Polish language summer school at a Polish university because the additional language meant better results at their Norwegian school and greater opportunities during the university recruitment process or 'sometime at work'. According to her, it is a strategy pursued by many families:

The parents explain it saying 'Listen, you'll pass a Polish language examination here and you'll have it on your school certificate and it's simply an additional foreign language, right, and you're a certified user of it'. So they are working hard here to get such grades and those ambitious children pass those examinations here and she already wants to do that now.

Migrant parents admit that this strategy is sometimes quite difficult. While younger children are happy to attend the supplementary school as they can meet other Polish children and play together, older children are less willing to continue their Polish education. Ela (17 years in Norway) told us that her daughter complained a lot that she had to spend Saturday¹⁸ at school but her mother felt that it was worth it because 'maybe someday it will be useful for her'. On the one hand, this can be perceived as an example of Collins' 'escaping forward' but, on the other, it could also be an example of how migrants navigate their resource environments (Levitt et al. 2017). In order to secure her child's future, the migrant uses various elements of the 'package of protection' to which she has access. Another interviewee, Kaja (4 years in Norway) followed the same strategy. As she admitted, at that time she had no intention of returning to Poland but wanted her son to learn Polish because they 'did not know how it [the dice] would roll in the future' – perhaps her family would have to return to Poland or her 'son would like to study in Poland'. Helena, cited above, emphasised that, after the crisis period had passed, her daughter found the schooling useful for her future, her mother describing it as 'a new way of thinking'.

5.7 Conclusions

Do Polish migrant parents resort only to using the assumptions of the welfare state in the area of education – egalitarianism and inclusiveness – when designing for themselves national and transnational strategies for gaining resources for their children? The education system acts like a magnifying glass, showing the Nordic

¹⁷ The most important reasons here are to preserve a link to the sending society, to maintain family ties or to foster national identity but there is also a utilitarian motive.

¹⁸ In most Polish supplementary schools in Norway, classes take place on Saturdays.

welfare model with its key principles of social solidarity, freedom, equality, co-operation and mutuality. However, as we have seen, in the case of migrant parents one of the key issues is the assessment of the education system and educational opportunities in both the country of destination and of origin. Certain ideas and patterns known from the country of origin are confirmed and strengthened by transnational practices and how they function in the transnational social field. Relationships with children and parents in Poland or the community of origin and the exchange of experiences and judgements cause migrant parents to constantly draw comparisons between the two systems. At the same time, due to their experiences of the post-Communist transformational period in Poland, with its many years of high unemployment and an unstable labour market, these parents tended to build strategies for increasing their children's life chances. They perceive the education system as a key factor in achieving this goal and treat it as a valuable resource. Yet they understand education not as a good that should be equally accessible and granted to all children but, rather, as limited capital. As a result, a position of rivalry becomes the preferred attitude, with the focus on the benefits to their own children. The parents' attitude towards the school system is – especially in the first years – somewhat pragmatic and individualistic rather than cooperative.

May it thus be summarised that, in general, Polish migrant parents show less involvement in the life of the school and treat it instead as a service? Our findings demonstrate that their lack or lower level of engagement may be caused by their unfamiliarity with the Norwegian education system and their expectations of school. Polish assumptions are transferred onto Norwegian schools, especially the conviction that the lives of the family and of the school lie in separate spheres of reality. At the same time, these parents have been willing to co-operate primarily because of their children – so as not to harm them. Moreover, living in a transnational space, they learn to navigate resources accessible in both countries in order to receive and provide social protection (Levitt et al. 2017). Finally, to a certain extent, it is – as our narrative demonstrates – simply that both the passage of time and their increasing integration into Norwegian society reveal that the migrant parents' approach may be subject to change.

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